(c) if not, when Government propose to open the dialogue with China for this purpose; and

(d) what other steps are contemplated in the matter?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) to (d) The two sides are discussing the boundary question in the framework of the India-China Joint Working Group on the Boundary Question (JWG). The Eleventh Meeting of the JWG was held in Beijing on April 26-27, 1999. India and China have reiterated the objective of seeking a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable settlement of the boundary question through dialogue. Both sides have also reiterated their commitment to maintaining peace and tranquillity in the India-China border areas.

Establishment of US Foreign Commercial Service Office at Hyderabad

1564. DR. Y. LAKSHMl PRASAD: Will the Minister of EXTER NAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state that the action taken to clear early the proposal for establishment of US foreign commercial service office at Hyderabad to quicken business activity in the State?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): The US Government had requested opening of Foreign Commercial Service Offices in some Indian cities, including Hyderabad. The Government considers all proposals taking into account ovedrall Indo-US commercial relations, reciprocity and the volume of business in suggested locations. Decisions in respect of opening of such offices in Bangalore, Pune and Ahmedabad have already been conveyed. About Hyderabad the matter is under the active consideration of the Government.

India's Readiness to Sign the CTBT

1565. SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY:
SHRI JANESHWAR MISRA:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the reported comment of U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright in

the Time Magazine to the effect that India and Pakistan have agreed to sign the CTBT;

(b) whether there has been change in India's stand in this regard and so, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether the matter was also raised by the Prime Minister of Japan with the India's Minister of External Affairs during the latter's visit to Japan; and

(d) if so, the stand taken by India and whether any positive assurance was given in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) Yes Sir.

(b) No Sir. India's position on the CTBT was articulated by the Prime Minister in the UN General Assembly in September 1998 and in Parliament in December 1998. This was reiterated by the External Affairs Minister at the UN General Assembly in September 1999. The priority of our meeting the country's national security concerns having been addressed, the government believes that we now need to convey reassurance to the international community and, in this regard, desires to develop a national consensus. That remains the Government's position.

(c) Yes Sir.

(d) India's position on the CTBT was reiterated.

Removal of obstacles in the issuance of passports

1566. SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY:
SHRI SARDAR GURCHARAN SINGH TOHRA:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government have drawn up a grandiose scheme for removing major obstacles in the issue of passports;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) by when the revised procedure is likely to be implemented so as to make the passport Office more user-friendly?

THE MINISTER OF STATES IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA): (a) to (c) Govemment is constantly endeavouring to improve the issue of passports and